DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 226 887 RC 013 861

AUTHOR Gass, Michael
TITLE "The Role of Creativity in Learning in the Outdoor Classroom".
PUB DATE 17 Nov 82
NOTE 11p.
PUB TYPE Viewpoints (120) -- Reports - Descriptive (141)

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Creative Development; *Educational Environment; Elementary Secondary Education; Experiential Learning; *Outdoor Education; *Student Development; *Teacher Role; *Teaching Methods

ABSTRACT

Points on teaching students to be creative, practical techniques used to help creativity flourish, and the role of creativity in learning in the outdoor classroom are explored. Suggestions for encouraging creativity in the outdoors to occur are: to make use of the ample assortment of ways the outdoor environment can stimulate each student; to place students in environments which are conducive to creative thinking and responses; to provide a variety of media through which a student can express learning which is taking place in the outdoors; and to supply students with experiences which will increase their observations and examination abilities. Other suggestions include: eliminating a number of factors which can stifle a student's creative nature; using learning situations in outdoor education which require the student to be a more involved, independent, and responsible learner; handling the area of evaluation carefully; and leading students to synthesize as well as analyze. (Author/ERB)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

ED226887

"The Role of Creativity in Learning in the Outdoor Classroom"

Written by:

Michael Gass, Coordinator
Outdoor Education
University of New Hampshire

Submitted to: Outdoor Education Branch
ERIC/CRESS
P.O. Box 3AP
New Mexico State University
Las Cruces, NM 88003

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Michael Gass

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

☐ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

✓ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

November 17, 1982

RC013861

Creativity
Michael Gass

Abstract: Gass, Michael A. "The Role of Creativity in Learning in the Outdoor Classroom"

Can we as educators teach our students to be creative? What are some practical techniques one can use to help creativity flourish in the Outdoor Classroom? This article discusses these points and explores the role of creativity in learning in the Outdoor Classroom.

Some of the author's suggestions for encouraging creativity in the outdoors to occur are:

1. Make use of the ample assortment of ways the outdoor environment can stimulate each student.
2. Place students in environments which are conducive to creative thinking and responses.
3. Provide a variety of mediums through which a student can express learning which is taking place in the outdoors.
4. Supply students with experiences which will increase their observation and examination abilities.
5. Eliminate a number of factors which can stifle a student's creative nature.
6. Use learning situations in Outdoor Education which require the student to be a more involved, independent and responsible learner.
7. Handle the area of evaluation carefully.
8. Lead students to synthesize as well as analyze.

A number of distinct teaching styles and methods have been developed to utilize the Outdoors as a valuable learning environment. Some of these methods have been identified as the "exploratory or discovery" approach to learning (Hammerman, 1973), the "process" approach to learning (Oregon State Department of Education, n.d.), and the "Outdoor learning hierarchy" (Ford, 1981). It is the ultimate goal of many of these teaching styles and methods to have the student develop creative responses to the various learning situations they encounter in the Outdoor Classroom. Can we as educators 'teach' our students to be creative? What are some practical techniques one can use to help creativity flourish in the Outdoor Classroom? It is the purpose of this article to discuss these points and explore the role of creativity in learning in the Outdoor Classroom.

Many individuals feel that the teacher can have a role in helping students to develop creative processes in education. Torrance (1966) defines creativity as "the process of sensing problems or gaps in information, forming ideas and hypotheses, testing and modifying these hypotheses, and communicating the results." Whether one can 'teach' these desired outcomes of sensing, formulating, testing, modifying, and/or communicating is debatable. But many individuals feel that the process of creative learning in students can be positively affected by educators. Some individuals feel creativity may be encouraged (Biehler, 1974), some think it may be developed (Torrance, 1966), while others believe it may be induced through increasing an individual's ability to question, examine, and innovate (Mosston, 1981).

If educators can affect the process of creative learning in students, what are some practical methods Outdoor Educators can employ to encourage creativity in the Outdoor Classroom to occur?

1. <u>Make use of the ample assortment of ways the Outdoor Environment can</u>

stimulate each student. Using multisensory approaches to learning (i.e. learning through hearing, touching, feeling, smelling, seeing, and tasting) helps develop a sensitivity in the student to the world around them. Through this sensitivity, each student should develop an attachment to and perspective of their surrounding environment. It is with this type of co-existence one can expect creative growth to occur (Torrance, 1963).

2. Place students in environments which are conducive to creative thinking and responses. The outdoors provides a large number and wide variety of settings which can motivate students' creative processes. Examples of these situations in the Outdoor Classroom include:

- Challenge each student through the use of new and exciting skills and activities. These activities, supplemented with teaching methods which motivate the student to inquire about the materials being learned, creates the curiosity necessary to spur the student on to solve learning problems. This curiosity should be coupled with the allowance for students to solve this new problem by their own resources. By permitting individuals to be involved in executing their own learning, the chance of creative responses to the problem will be increased. While this method of discovery (Hammerman, 1973), cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957), or inquiry (Bruner, 1961) has been used with cognitive processes as well as psychomotor tasks (Mosston, 1981), it is also being implemented in the development of creative solutions with affective learning situations (e.g. debriefing growth experiences in adventure activities).
- Utilize the ability of the outdoors to free students' imagination and sense of play with new ideas and materials. So often students feel inhibited by an indoor classroom, desk, or building structure. The tra-

ditional classroom sometimes inhibits creativity in students by clouding creative responses with earlier images, failing to permit a creative mood to occur, and inhibiting body postures which are most conducive to creative thinking (Torrance, 1966). The rich and varied background of experiences the Outdoor Classroom can provide permits the student to bring about creative responses through the exploration of new material.

3. Provide a variety of mediums through which a student can express the learning which is taking place in the Outdoor Classroom. Sometimes students find it difficult or limiting to try and place original ideas or images in words (Torrance, 1966). Assignments which provide opportunities for creative behavior by calling for original work, independent learning, self-initiated projects, and experimentation help remove these restrictions from students. Singing a song, sketching an outdoor experience with natural materials, writing about experiences in a journal, or re-creating a scaled-down model of a farm in the 1700's after an investigative visit are all methods students can use to express the creative learning process they are going through in the Outdoor Classroom.

4. Supply the student with experiences which will increase their observation and examination abilities. By receiving more incoming stimuli through increased observation and examination capabilities, students may become more curious and increase their desire to learn.

Example: A student with heightened observation and examination capabilities will not perceive an old, rotting log as a dead piece of wood, but as an alive, living world full of many vital interrelationships between various organisms.

5. Eliminate a number of factors which can stifle a student's creative nature. Some of these factors which should be eliminated include:

A. The fear of error (Mussen, et al., 1979). Many times students will censor creative ideas because the risk of failure is much greater than the price of success. Educators must make the Outdoor Classroom a place where creative ideas are not in the position to be judged with a label such as 'failure' or create a learning environment where failure is not seen as a negative occurrence, but an experience which might possibly lead to future successful creative responses.

Another method of dealing with failure and the adverse effects it has on creative thinking in students is to 'de-sensitize' them from the perception that appearing inept or presenting 'too far out' ideas is always harmful. This can be done in a number of ways. An example of one is processing the effects of the Project Adventure initiative, "The Balance Broom." In this exercise, students must hold a stick or broom over their head, look at the top of it, turn their body around twenty times, set the broom down and just step over it. One of the benefits of this exercise is that "... most will initially fail, and in doing so expose themselves before the group. This potentially negative exposure acts as a reduction to the sensitivity to failure before a group because it is fun and the group, engrossed in the enjoyment of the movement, is supportive of any effort, no matter how inept." (Roenke, 1978).

B. Do not 'freeze or unduly shape' a student's thinking. Experiments involving creative thinking tests show that giving examples tends to increase fluency and reduce originality (Torrance, 1966). There is a need for making sure the students understand the learning problem and have the

resources available to solve it, but teaching techniques which require the use of preset standards or examples for students to follow should be avoided.

6. Use learning situations in Outdoor Education which require the student to be a more involved, independent, and responsible learner. The more involved students become with the actual learning process (e.g. sensing problems, forming ideas and hypotheses, testing and modifying these hypotheses, and communicating the results), the more opportunity students will have to include their own creative solutions in the learning process. This 'student responsibility' for their specific learning process leads to the development of very positive concepts and processes about future, general learning experiences. The ultimate goals of education are achieved by students developing creative solutions to the many problems they encounter in the Outdoor Classroom and then transfering these learning strategies to other learning experiences. Examples of the concepts and processes obtained through creative problem solving include adaptability, curiosity, imagination, discovery, efficiency and innovation.

7. Handle the area of evaluation carefully. Probably no other single item has done more to limit creativity from occurring in students than evaluation. Torrance (1966) has a number of guidelines concerning the use of evaluation with creative students which can apply to the Outdoor Classroom.

- avoid giving evaluative comments too frequently during practice problems and activities
- provide unevaluated ("off-the-record") practice. Students are sometimes unproductive in responding to tests of creative thinking until they are urged to give their ideas "just for fun" or assured that "this doesn't count."

- give creative or constructive evaluation (pointing out other possibilities) rather than critical evaluation (pointing out defects to be corrected)

Sometimes learning experiences which are not evaluated at all lead to further creativity than ones which are. An example of this can be seen in a creative writing exercise with trees. In this exercise, students write about a particular tree they select in the Outdoor Classroom. After they complete the exercise and come back into the group with their creative expression of the tree, how should the teacher evaluate their products? Compliment everyone? Say nothing? One possibility is to point out the different types of creative expression in the class and praise the original work, productive thinking, and experimentation students put into their project. This method of rewarding creative achievements in the Outdoor Classroom will make the classroom environment more conducive to student inquiry, creative research, and creative problem solving and further the development of students' skills in creative learning (Torrance, 1966) Another reason not to evaluate the creative writing done in the exercise is to impress upon the students that the purpose of writing is to communicate ideas. Too often educators have students write for the sole purpose of having the teacher evaluate it.

8. Lead students to synthesize as well as analyze. The ability to synthesize complex data is just as important, if not more so, than the ability to analyze intricate phenomena. "Synthesis, however, is just as scientific as analysis. Analysis is useful in identifying defects; synthesis is necessary in pushing forward a new structure or possibility" (Torrance, 1966). This concept is especially important when leading a student to understand the various interrelationships which exist in the Outdoors (e.g. Humans and the Environment,

certain biological symbiotic and ambiotic relationships, etc.). To separate a segment from these interrelationships and analyze it is a failing in understanding the purpose of these relationships and their reason for existence. By studying the components together, the student develops a creative understanding for the occurrences in the relationships.

Research substantiates the fact that students learn many things, though not all, more effectively and economically through teaching methods which implement creative styles rather than authoritative styles (Torrance, 1963, 66). This research also states that " ... many individuals have a strong preference for learning creativity, learn a great deal if permitted to use their creative thinking abilities, and make little educational progress when we insist they learn by authority." (Torrance, 1966). Outdoor Education holds many of the key elements necessary for facilitating creative thinking and responses to occur in the student's learning process. Creativity definitely has a strong association with teaching in, about, and for the outdoors. It is our responsibility as continual learners and our obligation as Outdoor educators to make sure that the valuable relationship between creativity and learning plays a major role in the education which occurs in ourselves and our students.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Biehler, Robert F. Psychology Applied to Teaching. Boston, Massachusetts: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1974.

Ford, Phyllis M. Principles and Practices of Outdoor/Environmental Education, New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1981.

Gilbert, Anne Green. Teaching the Three R's Through Movement Experiences, Minneapolis, Minnesota: Burgess Publishing Company, 1977.

Gowan, John Curtis, et. al. Creativity: Its Educational Implications, New York, New York: John Wiley and Sons, Inc., 1967.

Hammerman, D. and Hammerman W. Teaching Outdoor Education. Minneapolis, MN. Burgess Publishing Company, 1974.

Mosston, Muska. Teaching Physical Education. 2nd Edition. Columbus, Ohio: Charles E. Merrill Publishing Co., 1981.

Musser, Paul Henry, etc. al. Child Development and Personality, New York, New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1979.

Oregon State Department of Education. Science in Oregon Schools, Salem, Oregon, no date.

Roenke, Karl. Cowstails and Cobras, Hamilton, Mass: Project Adventure, 1978.

Torrance, E. Paul. Guiding Creative Talent. Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1963.

Torrance, E. Paul. What Research Says to the Teacher about Creativity, Washington, D.C.: National Educators Association, 1966.